

The Family Farm  
and Native Land Return  
A Personal Story

# Outline

- The history of “legalized” land theft
- A personal story
- Reasons for land return
- Practical ways to return land in Minnesota

# “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 1

## The Christian Doctrine of Discovery 1400’s

Papal bulls of the 1400’s mandated Christian explorers to “invade, subdue and vanquish” the Indigenous peoples of Africa and the Americas, “reduce them to perpetual slavery,” and take their land and possessions.

[www.doctrineofdiscovery.org](http://www.doctrineofdiscovery.org)

Let's celebrate Columbus day by walking into someone's house and telling them we live there now



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# “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 2

## Louisiana Purchase 1803



# “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 3

US Supreme Court 1823 - Johnson v. M’Intosh



Based on the Doctrine of Discovery, in 1823 the US Supreme Court ruled the US has “absolute title” to all land in its boundaries. Indigenous nations only have the right of “occupancy” as agreed by the US government.

# “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 4 Indian Removal Act 1830



## “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 5

Treaties – Ignore the chiefs who refuse to sign



"Zebulon Pike negotiated the treaty enabling the United States to build a military post here. Besides Ft. Snelling, the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport is located on land ceded in this treaty. Of the seven Indian leaders present at the negotiations, only two signed the treaty."

Minnesota Historical Society

## “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 6

Treaties – Use the fur trade and debt to get land

“In 1827, the American Fur Company (AFC) achieved a monopoly on the fur trade in what is now Minnesota. American Indians ... found themselves cast into a debt cycle. ... The business strategy changed from fur trading to treaty making. In 1837, economically stressed Dakota and Ojibwe people began selling land. Fur traders, through their political connections, were able to divert government payments for American Indian land into their own pockets. In effect, land cession treaties became a vast government bailout of fur trade corporations.” Minnesota Indian Affairs Council



# “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 7

Treaties – Kill buffalo / cause starvation to get land

“The strategy of the US military was to kill buffalo in order to destroy the Native American Indian population. ... Through this indirect strategy, almost total genocide of Native American populations living in the American West was achieved.”

Dina Lehman, “The Buffalo Harvest” (Inventory of Conflict and Environment, 1997)



## “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 8

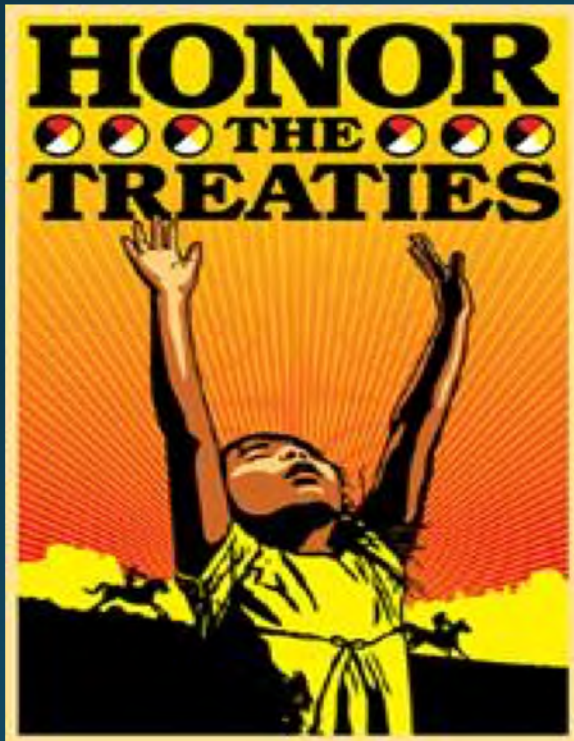
### Treaties – Military threat

“Everything that they used to get them to sign treaties, I think was illegal in a lot of ways -- browbeating, brainwashing, and then on the other hand telling them, 'If you sign this treaty, you're not going to ever have to work or hunt again; we'll take care of you.' . . . The other alternative is: 'We're going to drive you all the way to the Rocky Mountains where you're going to starve to death and we'll never have to worry about you again.'”

Dr. Elden Lawrence, Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota community, 2010

# “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 9

## Treaties – Break or nullify to get land



“Over 500 treaties were made with American Indian tribes, primarily for land, but 500 treaties were also broken, changed or nullified when it served the government’s interests.”

Partnership with Native Americans

# “Legalized” Land Theft – Stage 10

## Dawes Allotment Act 1887

This legislation divided Indian land into allotments for individual Indian families. Land left over after allotment was sold to non-Indians. The effect was devastating. Indian land decreased from 138 million acres in 1887 to 48 million acres in 1934 - a decrease of 65 %.

**INDIAN LAND FOR SALE**

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OF  
YOUR OWN  
EASY PAYMENTS



PERFECT TITLE  
POSSESSION  
WITHIN  
THIRTY DAYS

**FINE LANDS IN THE WEST**

IRRIGATED IRRIGABLE      GRAZING      AGRICULTURAL DRY FARMING

In 1910 the Department of the Interior Sold Under Sealed Bids Allotted Indian Land as follows:

Acres	Value	Number of Acres	Number of Acres	Number of Acres	Number of Acres
1,000,000	\$10,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000

Source: Library of Congress

## Pivotal Question

What does it mean to benefit from forced removal and stolen land?



# My Story

## My Hometown



Where's the mountain?

What happened to the lake?

# My Story

## Jeffers Petroglyphs



About 12 miles from Mountain Lake are the Jeffers petroglyphs. The earliest petroglyphs are estimated to be 7,000 to 9,000 years old.

# My Story

## The original village of “Mountain Lake”

This “mountain” was the location of an Indigenous village surrounded by a shallow lake (that was later drained for farmland). Artifacts found by a 1976 archaeological survey date to 500 BC.

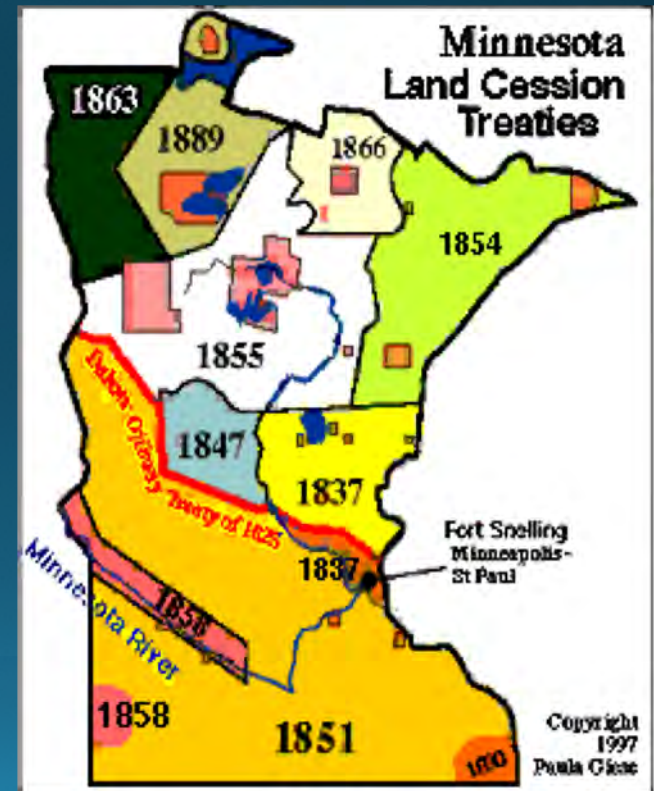




# My Story

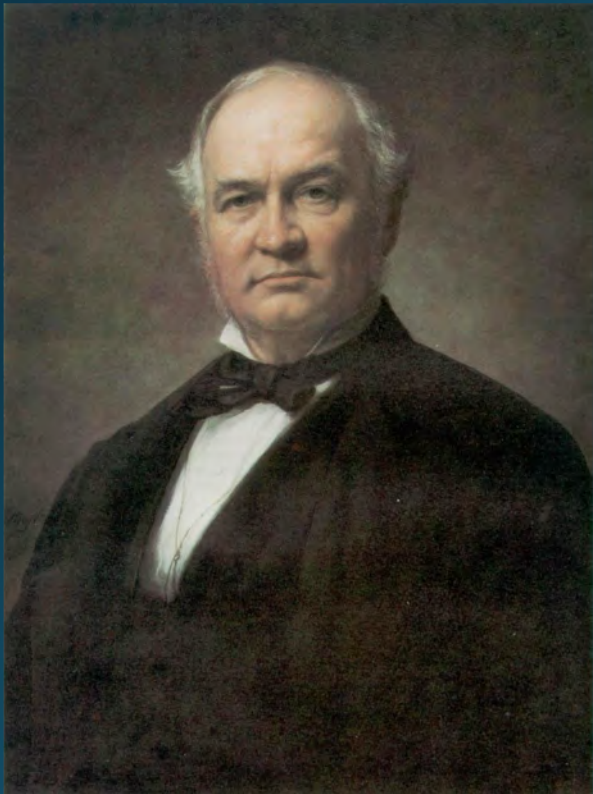
## 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux

This treaty opened 24 million acres of land to white settlers. Through deception and military threat, Dakota people lost most of their MN homeland. In return they were promised annual food rations and money. Much of the money was diverted to fur traders such as Henry Sibley and Alexander Ramsey.



# My story

1862 - 1863 Dakota “extermination” and removal



“The Sioux Indians ... must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the boundaries of the state.”

Governor Alexander Ramsey speech before the Minnesota State Legislature on September 9, 1862

# My Story

1860's Homestead Act; Railroad expansion



# My Story

## 1870's Mennonite migration to Mountain Lake

The Homestead Act of 1862 and the offer of land near the railroad attracted Mennonite immigrants from Russia to settle in the Mountain Lake area in the early 1870's. These immigrants included my great grandparents.

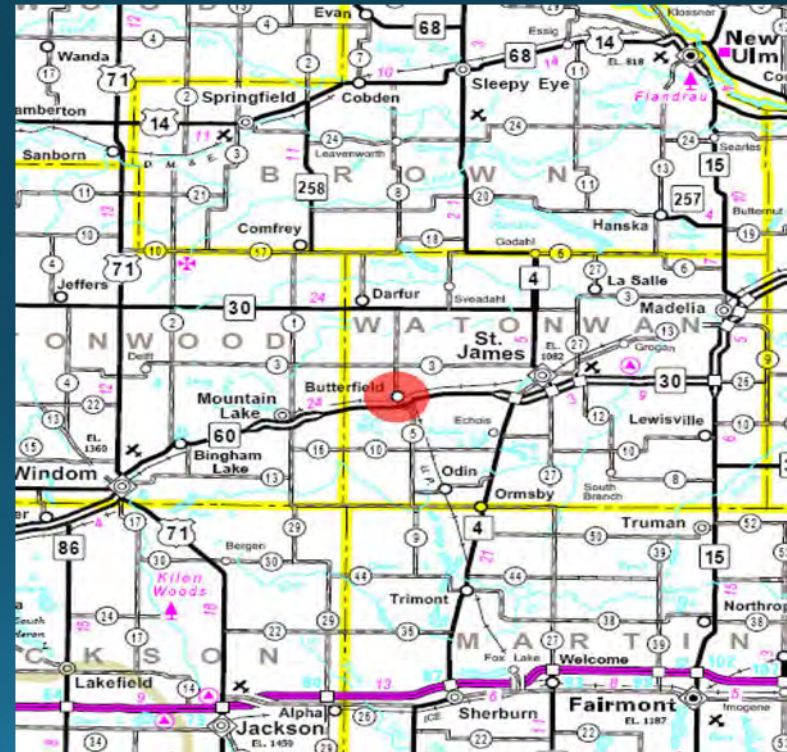


# My Story

## Inherited land

13 acres near Butterfield, MN was my share of inheritance from my grandparents' farm. In 2012 my family sold the farm.

I returned half the proceeds from my share to Indigenous groups working for land justice (most to *Makoce Ikikcupi*).



# My Story

## *Makoce Ikikcupi* (Land Recovery)



A nonprofit dedicated to:

- Land recovery in *Minisota Makoce*
- Reconnecting Dakota people to their homeland
- Culturally-oriented Dakota communities
- Sustainable practices for the lands and waters
- Living the ethic of “all my relations”

# My Story

## 2,000 Mile Tricycle Tour



# Reasons for Land Return – 1

## A Practical Consideration



It is unrealistic to return all the land, but it is unjust to return none. The question is not whether to return land, but how.



# Reasons for Land Return – 2

## Systemic Racism has Two Sides

One side is oppression of people of color. The other side is unjust benefit for European Americans - in this case the land stolen from Native people for the benefit of settlers and their descendants.



# Reasons for Land Return - 3

## Right Relationship with the Land



Let's give up a sense of "entitlement" to stolen land, and replace it with a sense of fairness and justice.

## Reasons for Land Return – 4

### Tiny Dakota Reservations are not Justice

“We have four tiny reservations in southern Minnesota. These constitute about 12 thousandths of one percent of our original homeland. We don’t think this represents justice by anyone’s standard.”

James Rock - Dakota



# Reasons for Land Return - 5

## Winona LaDuke on the loss of biodiversity



The last 150 years have seen a great holocaust. There have been more species lost in the past 150 years than since the Ice Age. During the same time, Indigenous peoples have been disappearing from the face of the earth.

# Reasons for Land Return - 6

## Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery



- Disciples of Christ
- Episcopal Church
- ELCA
- Friends General Conference
- Mennonite Church USA
- Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Unitarian Universalist Ass'n
- United Church of Christ
- United Methodist Church
- World Council of Churches
- **What's the next step?**

# Reasons for Land Return - 7

## The Restorative Justice Model

What harm was done to whom? The land was stolen from the Native people.

How can the harm be repaired? Land return.

Who is responsible for the repair? Descendants of the settlers.



# Reasons for Land Return - 8

## Three Insights from Restorative Justice



Accepting personal responsibility to make repair.

A moral imperative to repair harm - not merely a moral option.

When the beneficiary of harm makes repair, then there is healing.

# Practical Ways to Return Land

- Return a portion of proceeds from land or real estate sales to Indigenous groups working for land justice
- Return monthly “back rent”
- Return the amount of your property taxes
- Deed land to an Indigenous community
- Put land reparations in your will or estate



# MN Indigenous Groups working for Land Justice

- *Makoce Ikikcupi* - Dakota land return in Minnesota
- Honor the Earth - National organization working for environmental land justice
- Indian Land Tenure Foundation - National organization working for land return (especially land stolen through “allotment”)